

School & Court Linkages

A Periodic Newsletter of the Superintendents - Judges Liaison Committee

Issue 1, January 2000

The inaugural issue of this newsletter is a celebration of four successful years of a Liaison Committee of school superintendents and juvenile and domestic relations court judges in Virginia.

The Superintendents-Judges Liaison Committee was created in 1995 by Dr. William C. Bosher, Jr., then superintendent of public instruction, in response to a request from the Executive Committee of the Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court Judges Association.

The purpose of the committee is to establish a permanent liaison that will maintain open lines of communication between superintendents and judges and address issues of mutual concern.

The committee consists of eight school division superintendents and eight judges, one from each of the superintendents' regions. The Virginia Association of School Superintendents appointed the superintendents. Chief Justice Harry L. Carrico, of the Supreme Court of Virginia, invited the judges to participate.

Meetings are held twice each year. The superintendent and judge from each region host regional meetings of

superintendents and judges on a periodic basis. The Virginia Department of Education has provided grant funds to support these meetings.

Over the years, the Liaison Committee has addressed the following issues:

- The roles of the superintendent and judge with respect to at-risk youths in the community
- Truancy, including collaborative approaches to truancy reduction
- Handling student threats of violence, weapons in schools, getting cases to court in a timely manner and effectively presenting the case in court.
- Youth gangs
- Legislation affecting both the schools and the juvenile court
- Alternative Education.

Methods for dealing effectively with truancy is a recurring topic as both the schools and the juvenile and domestic relations courts struggle with effective methods to address this problem.

Current membership:

*Dr. David C. Stuckwisch
Hopewell City Public Schools*

*The Honorable Samuel E. Campbell
Hopewell Juvenile and Domestic Relations
District Court*

*Dr. Steven R. Staples
York County Public Schools*

*The Honorable William R. Moore, Jr.
Isle of Wight Juvenile and Domestic Relations
District Court*

*Dr. Sharon D. Dodson
King William County Public Schools*

*The Honorable Maston Davis
Richmond County Juvenile and Domestic
Relations Court*

*Dr. Nancy C. Vance
Warren County Public Schools*

*The Honorable Jane B. Delbridge
Fairfax Juvenile and Domestic Relations
District Court*

*Dr. T. Lowell Lemons
Waynesboro City Public Schools*

*The Honorable Dale H. Harris
Lynchburg Juvenile and Domestic Relations
District Court*

*Dr. Linda Weber
Roanoke County Public Schools*

*The Honorable J.P. Bounds
Roanoke Juvenile and Domestic Relations
District Court*

*Mr. Woodrow Mullins
Tazewell County Public Schools*

*The Honorable J. Wesley McClintock, III
Tazewell County Juvenile and Domestic
Relations District Court*

*Dr. Jo Lynne DeMary
Acting Superintendent for Public Instruction*

*Mr. Robert N. Baldwin, ex officio
Executive Secretary, Supreme Court of Virginia*

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Spotlight: *Truancy Reduction*

The Liaison Committee has deliberated on numerous occasions on approaches used to reduce truancy in public schools. Following are a compilation of ideas shared over the years.

Communication:

On-going communication between school and court officials is the key to effective truancy reduction programs. Officials representing social services (for children receiving Temporary Aid to Needy Families [TANF]), law enforcement, business, as well as community leaders should also be included.

Joint Planning:

Collaborative planning can address issues as the following:

- filing with the intake officer or magistrate;
- presenting information in court;
- obtaining an expedited docket in court;
- timing of a referral to the family assessment and planning team;
- developing a short form for communicating essential information to the court and to law enforcement;
- creating a school and community climate that encourages school attendance;
- creating a community response to truancy;
- establishing parental responsibility for school attendance.

Planning should involve representatives of schools, court, social services, law enforcement, the commonwealth's attorney's office, local business leaders, and other community leaders (including the media).

Planning should address all grade levels, especially elementary schools to prevent the development of a truancy problem.

Training:

Train key school officials (e.g., attendance officers, guidance counselors, principals, assistant principals, and school social workers) on the court process. The juvenile and domestic relations court judge, intake officer, and the magistrate could provide this training for school officials. Topics could include:

- statutory requirements associated with finding a child to be a child in need of supervision;
- how to file a petition;
- information the court needs to determine that the school has met its obligations to address truancy under §16.1-228 (child in need of supervision definition) of the Code of Virginia;
- filing a petition with the intake officer; filing with the magistrate when charges are filed against a parent.

Invite a representative from the commonwealth's attorney to train school official on how to present evidence in court cases.

Invite the juvenile and domestic relations court judge to speak to students at the beginning of the school year about the importance of school attendance.

Provide training to the juvenile and domestic relations court judge, the intake officer, the magistrate, and other

relevant court staff on the school's response to truancy and efforts to prevent truancy.

Use of the interdisciplinary team:

Since the court must direct that a child's service needs be evaluated using an interdisciplinary team prior to the child being found in need of supervision (COV §16.1-278.5), efforts to involve an interdisciplinary team should take place prior to appearing in court. Options include use of the following:

- a school-based child study team;
- a team involving the local social services department for children receiving TANF;
- use of the family assessment and planning team.

Court docketing:

A number of courts have expedited the process of getting a truant child to court in response to school officials' concerns. Some courts have established a regular docket for hearing truancy cases (e.g., one morning every other week).

Public involvement:

Public involvement includes working within the community to establish expectations for school attendance (e.g., work with the media, local businesses)

Parental involvement:

Judges note that few school divisions take advantage of the option to file charges against a parent for failing to send a child to school. Some judges will fine the parent, but suspend the fine contingent upon parental involvement.